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SUBJECT: SICHUAN SECURITY PREPARES FOR TIBETAN ANNIVERSARIES

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CHENGDU 00000041 001.2 OF 003

CLASSIFIED BY: James A. Boughner, Consul General, U.S. Consulate General, Chengdu.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: Although still well below last year's levels, the security presence in Chengdu's Tibet-town and some other areas of the city is steadily growing in lead-up to the March 10 fiftieth anniversary of the Lhasa uprising against Communist authorities. Groups of six People's Armed Police (PAP) armored vehicles were seen several times in downtown Chengdu March 3, including one convoy that was photographed by a local blogger and placed on the Internet. During recent conversations in "Tibet-town," Buddhist monks and other interlocutors noted a significant increase in Public Security Bureau (PSB) and PAP officers, as well as numerous new roadblocks, throughout Tibetan areas of western Sichuan Province. Internet and cell phone messaging services between Chengdu and western Sichuan have reportedly been cut off. The Sichuan Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) confirmed March 5 that Tibetan areas in the province are closed to foreign nationals through at least the month of March. Monks from Aba and Ganzi Prefectures continue to flee to Chengdu rather than sign the Party loyalty pledge sought in an ongoing "patriotic education campaign." End Summary.

Security Ramp-Up

¶2. (S) Since just prior to the start of Tibetan New Year on February 25, Consulate staff have noted an increased security presence in Tibetan areas of Chengdu, specifically Tibet-town, home to approximately 30,000 ethnic Tibetans, as well as more recently near government office buildings in the downtown city center and at some local universities. PAP personnel carriers and other armored vehicles have appeared a number of times on the streets of Chengdu. On February 26, a large armored truck (camouflaged green, no plates) with several large antennae attached to its roof was seen about a block away from the Consulate. On March 3 at about 1830 hours, Consulate employees saw six PAP white APCs on Kehua Road near Sichuan University, while a local blogger photographed earlier in the day another convoy near government office buildings approximately three blocks from Tianfu Square in the city center. Photos are available at a URL abbreviated as www.tinyurl.com/Chengdu-APC. To our knowledge, armored vehicles were not in evidence in Chengdu on either March 4 or 5.

¶3. (S) On March 4-5, although Tibetans did not appear to be taking any obvious notice, ConGenOff saw that the security presence in Tibet-town was notably higher than several days previously. On March 5, two fully-filled PAP buses and a PAP van labeled "Comprehensive Law Enforcement," (Zonghe Zhifa) were

positioned on the main street (Wuhouci Dong Jie) across from the Wuhouci Temple, one of Chengdu's top tourist destinations. Tape covered the license plates of the vehicles. On March 4, there had been only one PAP bus stationed in this location. On March 5, a large PSB van with the number "4" taped on the back supplemented the large bus (taped number "1") filled with police that had also been there the day before.

¶4. (S) Some PAP and PSB in helmets and bullet-resistant vests were out of the vehicles, including one PSB officer who cradled an automatic weapon and another who had a weapon that resembled a revolver connected to a long, thick tube, perhaps an anti-riot gas gun. Several more PSB cars were parked along the main street, as well as a PSB K-9 van with two police dogs inside was at the intersection. PSB cars passed through the main intersection at a rate of about two per minute.

¶5. (S) Five PSB cars were parked midway along or towards the end of Tibet-town's four main streets and two or three more at the intersection, all with their flashers on. Several PSB cars were parked on side streets just east of the Southwest Nationalities University adjacent to Tibet-town. Groups of five militia (Minbing) with clubs also patrolled the streets. They wore yellow stripes on their shoulders, in the middle of which "MB" appeared in red letters. Their shoulder patches indicated they were Wuhou District Militia (Wuhouqu Minbing). ConGenOff did not see Minbing patrols in Tibet-town during the government's security response in the area in 2008.

Ganzi Crackdown

¶6. (C) On February 28, a Japanese photographer and his Tibetan tour guide told ConGenOff at a restaurant in Tibet-town that

CHENGDU 00000041 002.2 OF 003

they had encountered many roadblocks during a visit to Ganzi Prefecture in western Sichuan. The photographer said he and his guide had decided to travel at night hoping that searches would be less thorough, and indeed his cameras were never checked. His Tibetan tour guide said that cell phone messaging has been cut off in Ganzi Prefecture. On March 4, the Consulate heard from multiple contacts that Internet and cell phone messaging between Chengdu and Ganzi and Aba Prefectures has been cut off. According to a Consulate contact, in late February, people in Tongxiao Township in Xinlong (Nyarong) County in Ganzi had staged a protest and burned down a township government building.

¶7. (SBU) On March 5, the Sichuan Foreign Affairs Office, in response to a query from the Consulate about possible travel restrictions in Tibetan areas, told us that Ganzi and Aba Prefectures, as well as the county of Muli, are "completely closed" to foreigners through at least the month of March. Consulate is still waiting for clarification from the FAO if this includes the popular tourist resort of Jiuzhaigou in Aba.

Aba Abbot

¶8. (C) During a February 25 visit by ConGenOff to Tibet-town, the Abbot of the Dzamthang Monastery (Nyingma School) in Rangtang County, Aba Prefecture told him that travel to and from Aba had become very difficult. The Abbot recently had wanted to return to his monastery but there were too many police checks along the way. When asked if traveling in plainclothes would make it any easier (the Abbot was wearing Buddhist robes), he replied, "The police can usually tell who is a monk. If you are in plainclothes, they are tougher on you, demanding why are you dressed in plainclothes and beat you up."

¶9. (C) According to the Abbot, following the unrest of March

2008, ten of the 270 monks at his monastery had been arrested. Most had since been released, except for three monks who had each been given three-year sentences. The Abbot did not know if these were court sentences or Public Security Bureau-imposed detentions. (Note: Just prior to a subsequent meeting ConGenOff had set with the Abbot two days later, a call from him was suddenly cut off. ConGenOff tried to call back, but the cell phone connection was not allowed. After a few minutes Congenoff called again, got through, but then was cut off again. The Abbot did not show up for the planned meeting.

Mounting Pressure on Larung Gar Monks

¶10. (C) On another trip to Tibet-town, ConGenOff spoke with a monk who said he was from Seda County in Ganzi. The monk indicated there were 170 monks in his monastery, one of the many colleges that form the large Larung Gar Monastery in northern Ganzi. According to the monk, he and other monks had been under great pressure to sign a pledge agreeing to Chinese government demands, including denouncing the Dalai Lama and accepting the Beijing-designated Panchen Lama. Monks are told they must sign the pledge or leave the monastery and return home. Thus far, 30 monks "who were weak" had given in to the pressure and signed.

¶11. (C) The monk told ConGenOff he had left his monastery ten days earlier to come to Chengdu. He claimed that other monks were leaving the monastery one by one at different times rather than all together to escape detection. (Note: The Ganzi monk was in his mid-thirties and appeared well educated. He spoke excellent Chinese with very standard pronunciation, unusual for a monk. Many Tibetan monks do not speak Chinese well). According to the monk, many monks from Larung Gar are currently in Chengdu. They are supported in many different ways, some by local Buddhist associations, some work to earn money by making things for temples, some serve in local temples, and some ask for money in the streets. He observed that Tibetan monks often travel to inland China and teach Buddhism to Han Chinese, noting that he himself had once gone to Hainan Province to teach the fundamentals of Tibetan Buddhism.

Comments:

¶12. (S) February 28 was the first time since mid-2008 that we observed PSB in Tibet-town outfitted with automatic weapons. The increased security presence we have seen so far in Chengdu appears still well below levels we witnessed immediately following the March 2008 outbreak of unrest when large PAP convoys were on the outskirts of the city, PAP with automatic weapons patrolled some downtown areas, helicopters could be heard over the city, and up to 100 PAP deployed briefly around the Consulate. None of our local staff can recall, however,

CHENGDU 00000041 003.2 OF 003

ever having seen APCs on the streets of Chengdu before. According to RSO FSN-I (protect), PAP forces stationed in Chengdu have never before been issued APCs. Somewhat ironically, the security crackdown underway in Ganzi and Aba Prefectures (between six-to-ten hours away by road) may result in an increase in Chengdu's ethnic Tibetan population as some monks and others seek refuge here.
BOUGHNER